

*Forms of Prayer vindicated; and the Li-
turgy of the Church of ENGLAND
recommended:*

I N A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D,

Pursuant to the W I L L of

Mr HUTCHINS,

In the PARISH-CHURCH of

St MARY-LE-BOW,

APRIL 26. 1731.

By JOSEPH WATSON, D. D.
Rector of St Stephen Walbrook in London.

*Publish'd at the Request of the Trustees of
the Charity-School of Cordwainer and
Breadstreet Wards.*

L O N D O N:

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against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill. 1731.

April 26. 1731.

At a Meeting of the Trustees of Cordwainer and Breadstreet Wards Charity-School, it was

Agreed,

THat the Thanks of the said Trustees should be, and they are hereby accordingly, given unto the Reverend Doctor *Watson*, for the Excellent Sermon by him preached this Morning, in the Parish-Church of St *Mary le-Bow*. And he is likewise desired to cause the same to be printed.

W. NORRIS, Sec.

LUKE xi. 2.

Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

IT was the custom of the Jewish doctors to teach their disciples a particular form of prayer. St. *John*, as it appears here, had done the same, and for that reason our Saviour's disciples were desirous to learn one of him; *Lord teach us to pray, &c.* he immediately complies with their request, and saith, when ye pray say, *Our Father, &c.*

The observations which I make upon this passage, and which I intend to be the subject of the following discourse, are these.

I. That prayer is a christian duty. II. That in the performance of that Duty it is lawful at least to use a set or pre-composed form. III. That it is necessary we should use that very form in it's own words, which our Saviour prescribed.

First, I observe hence that prayer is a christian duty. I own, I should want an apology for making this observation in a congregation of christians, who know the scriptures, were not the use of prayer so much neglected by many, in contempt of

the scriptures even while they profess to believe them; nay, argued against and exploded by some, as at least a superfluous and unnecessary, if not a sinful and presumptuous practice.

Their argument is, that prayer supposes God, either not to know our wants, or not to be disposed of himself to relieve them; and is therefore, rather a reproach than an act of honour and worship done to him.

But had this been the case, can any Christian think that our Saviour would not have taken the opportunity, which his disciples here gave him, to have told them so? And instead of gratifying them in their request, by teaching them how to pray, have given them to understand this, that their heavenly father knew their wants too well, and was of himself too well inclin'd towards them to require any such action of them? The direction therefore which he gave in this case is alone sufficient both to condemn all those careless and inconsiderate christians who neglect to pray, and to silence all those bold and hardy ones, who take upon them to justify this neglect by such vain and empty reasoning.

My second observation was, that it is at least lawful for christians when they pray to use pre-composed and set forms. I prove this point the same way that I did the other.

other. I observed to you at the beginning of this discourse, that it was the custom of the Jewish doctors to teach their disciples forms of prayer, and that this was probably, the ground upon which our Saviour's disciples desired the same of him. Now is it reasonable to think that he would have done as they desired him, had it not been lawful for them when they pray to use a form? Wou'd he not have been in justice bound to have answered them in some such manner as this; *John*, it is true, taught his disciples how to pray; and the Jewish doctors taught their disciples how to pray by forms, but it shall not be so with you, you that are to be my followers, and upon whom I design my holy Spirit to descend, shall not be ty'd up and cramped by forms: You shall pray after a more free and liberal manner, even as that same holy spirit shall give you utterance, without the least premeditation of yourselves, or direction from others how to pray: might it not, I say, with justice have been expected, that he should have exprest himself to some such effect as this, had it been contrary to the design of his gospel to pray to God by a form? Doubtless he would never have answered them as he did. *When ye pray say, Our father which art in heaven, &c.*

Well, but allowing that our Saviour hath enjoin'd this form to be used by Chri-

stians when they pray, (which, by the way, tho' is not allowed us by those that dispute forms of prayer with us, and must therefore be my business to prove under the third head of (this discourse) allowing this, I say, yet it may be asked, how does it follow from hence that other forms may be used as well as this? Does God by appointing us a form of prayer himself, give us a power to use such as are of men's composing and appointing? May not men as well take upon them to appoint new scripture to be read for publick instruction, because God has been pleased to do so, as new forms of prayer for publick worship because he hath thought fit to do that?

To all this we think we properly answer, when we say, that to prescribe scripture, and to prescribe forms of prayer are two very different things. The one is the word of God to man, and the other is the word of man to God. To pretend therefore, to prescribe scripture is to put ourselves in God's stead, and to assume a commission from him not to explain, but to dictate his word, which is arrogant and blasphemous in the highest Degree. But for the authority that is necessary to prescribe forms of prayer, there is nothing farther needful than the regular appointments of the Church, by which men become overseers and governors of the flock of Christ.

Inspiration

Inspiration cannot be necessary in this as in the other case, because, as we said before, prayer is the word of man to God, and we are taught to make it with submission to his wisdom; a circumstance this never to be reconcil'd with inspiration.

We do allow indeed that the prayers we meet with in scripture are all inspired, and that such were the prayers of the apostles and pastors, nay, of all the faithful at the first, whilst the church enjoy'd the extraordinary assistances of the Holy Spirit; but this no more proves that none but inspired persons now have a right to prescribe prayer, than it proves that none but such have a right to preach the word; for they that first undertook that were all inspired too.

Had it pleased God indeed, in his infinite wisdom, to have convey'd to us a system of inspired prayers, answerable to all possible occasions, it would have been insufferable presumption in us to have had recourse to any of our own or others composing; but this not being done, we think that a sufficient ground for the governours of the Church to go upon, in prescribing prayer as it's occasions require. And we look upon those examples of praying by a form, which the scriptures give us as good authority for the Church's imitation here in, provided it be done modestly, *i. e.* without pretending to be inspired, as the authors of those
forms

forms were, or imposing human compositions for the word of God, or saying any more in the behalf of them, than that they are consonant to it, and grounded upon it.

That form particularly which our Saviour has prescribed, is a very signal approbation of human forms ; for * (as a learned person has proved) several of the petitions that are contain'd there, are collected almost *verbatim* out of forms of human composition, that were used in the Jewish temple and synagogues in our Saviour's time, a thing which our Saviour would doubtless have avoided with the utmost caution, had it been his intent to condemn the use of such things : nay, considering how tenacious the Jews were of their old customs ; and that they were used to set forms in their devotion in and before his time ; there can no question be made but he would, instead of giving such a countenance to the practice as he did, have expressly forbid it, if he had designed that it should no longer continue.

But that he had no such design, appears further from the very early use of forms in the primitive church, about which there was not the least contest or dispute ; a thing that could not have been avoided, had it been judged by any number of men,

* Mr Gregory.

as a practice not agreeable to the gospel state, or not fit to succeed that miraculous gift of prayer, with which the church was indulged for some time at the beginning.

The truth of the case is in all likelihood this; upon the ceasing or abatement of that gift, forms precomposed as near to the example of those that had used to pray by inspiration as might be, were judged most answerable to the exigencies of the church, and fittest to supply the want of those miraculous assistances that were withdrawn from it.

But what occasion you will say had the church for any miraculous assistances to pray, when the founder of it had given them a set form to pray by? We are not to call in question the reason or the necessity of any thing which God is pleased in his infinite wisdom to do: but this we may safely infer from the Church having those miraculous assistances vouchsafed it. That Christ never intended the form which he prescribed, to be the only prayer made use of in the Church; and therefore, that we are not transgressing his commandment, when together with that we offer up other prayers that do more largely and particularly express those things which are there more generally and comprehensively pray'd for: and indeed the brevity of that form is itself a sufficient argument, that it could not be

be designed to be a perfect and absolute model of christian worship and devotion.

Thus you see what may be said for the lawfulness at least of praying by forms. We have observed to you, that there is a positive divine command for the use of one form of prayer: and that this prayer, by being in a good measure collected out of, or at least in its sense very nearly ally'd to the prayers that were of human compofure, and constantly used in the Jewish church, is a very signal approbation of human forms. It is on all hands agreed that this was the method of the Jewish worship; and yet our Saviour was so far from condemning, or forbidding his disciples to practise it, that he puts them into the same way, and adopts in some measure the very forms which they used.

Let us now see what is to be said in defence of praying in the church without forms; and if it appears that there is no authority for this in the word of God, no text that does enjoin it, and no antient practice since the gift of inspiration ceased to countenance it, forms must be allowed the preference, because for the use of them we have all the authority that those arguments can give us.

That text in the twelfth of *Zechariah* and the tenth verse, *I will pour out upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of*

of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications is often urged indeed in support of extempore prayer as a gift and an ability peculiar to the gospel-state; but I think it is much abused and perverted by being so applyed, for whether this prophecy has already had its completion or no, in the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles at the feast of pentecost, and the blessed consequences thereof to the church of Christ; or it is yet to be fulfilled upon the recalling of the Jews in the latter days, when God's kingdom upon earth shall be fully come. In which soever of these two lights, I say, we look upon this text; the spirit of grace and supplications mention'd in it, must needs mean a greater benefit, than the gift of extemporary utterance in prayer; for this, bad men, we see by experience, may have as great a share of as they that are truly devout; and therefore, cannot signify any part of those blessed fruits which are to accompany the pouring forth of the spirit upon the fulfilling of this prophecy. Is it not more natural to understand it of the gift of heavenly affections in prayer? For these are evident tokens of the spirit, and such as we cannot possibly have without it's presence and assistance; whereas, fluent and rhetorical expressions argue nothing more than the dexterity of our natural parts.

Some argue against forms of prayer, as not so agreeable as extemporary effusions to the sense of those texts wherein we are told, that *God hath sent forth the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying abba, i. e. father*: and again, *we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry abba, father*. Gal. iv. 6. Rom. viii. 15.

Whereas, all that these words can possibly import, with relation to prayer, is, that we are enabled and embolden'd by the assistance of the holy Spirit which Christ hath purchased for all true believers, to address ourselves to God with an assurance as to a merciful father, a privilege which we could not have obtained but through the redemption and mediation of a Saviour; and may we not address ourselves to God with this assurance as well when we pray by a set form, as when we do it otherwise?

A hasty and unpremeditated way of expressing ourselves in prayer, does argue indeed great presumption in us: but how it can give us a greater ground of assurance that God will mercifully hear us: or how these texts can be alledged to prove that it does, I cannot understand without transferring the merit, by which that privilege was obtain'd, from Christ, and placing it in our manner of praying; which is, supposing God to have a much greater regard for our
extempore

extempore effusions, than even they who are the fondest of that way would be thought to mean.

In short, the whole mistake in this affair seems to arise from not duly considering what prayer is, or wherein the nature of it does properly consist.

Some think it necessary to prayer that it be exprest in our own words, and therefore, that they, who use a form of another's composing, do not, properly speaking, pray, but only read a prayer.

Now I would ask them that think in this manner, whether they would allow a man to pray, that uses a form of his own composing? If they would, then the using of a form does not, even according to them, destroy the nature of prayer: if they would not, then let them shew how words utter'd extempore are more essential to prayer, than words premeditated and methodically digested: to be brief, let them shew how any words spoken either extempore or otherwise are essential to the nature of prayer, and that a man cannot pray to God devoutly and acceptably by lifting up his heart and affections to him, altho' he opens not his mouth all the while. For they seem wholly to go upon this notion as if words were of the essence of prayer, by explaining all those places of scripture, which relate to the gift of prayer of a ready utterance or expression;

whereas, the gift of prayer is certainly an inward and spiritual thing, *viz.* a heart full of heavenly affections, by which we are constantly disposed to apply ourselves to God, and this, we know, may be done even when words are wanting, or not done, when the most elegant words are used according to the temper and condition the mind may be in. And therefore I conclude, that since no words of any sort premeditated or unpremeditated, are essential to prayer, it is not necessary that we should pray in our own words.

The best authority that can be produced for praying as our own minds instantly suggest words to us, is, that the first christians pray'd, in all probability, in a way something like to this: *i. e.* they pray'd by virtue of a miraculous gift of utterance, which was indeed, in appearance, something like the way of our extempore pray-ers, but in reality vastly different from it. For this gift made what they delivered, whether in preaching or praying, to be the inspired word of God; which is more, I hope, than the greatest admirers of extempore prayer dare either affirm, or think of, that way.

We cannot therefore allow it as good reason, that we should pray to God, in his Church, after that extempore and unpremeditated manner the first christians probably

probably did, 'till it appears that we are endowed with the same supernatural gift of utterance that they were.

When that is done indeed, we shall no longer dispute the point with them, but at the same time, we think, they may as easily make it appear that we are endow'd with the gift of tongues too, as they were. And therefore, 'till such extraordinary abilities do manifest themselves in us, we judge it much the safer way, less tending to presumption, and more edifying to the Church, to rely upon premeditated and stated forms in the worship of God, than to perform that awful service as our own thoughts shall instantly suggest to us.

And this may, in a good measure serve for an answer to all those other texts of scripture, which are so often cited in behalf of extempore prayer, by reason of the word *gift*.

For there is no man, now adays, hath so excellent a gift of extempore utterance in prayer, but he can express himself better still, if he takes time to consider and digest the matter of it beforehand. And if this be the case of every single man, then a collection of men, surely, of good abilities this way, joining those abilities together, which is the way that stated forms are composed, cannot fail of expressing the sense and wants of the Church more justly, properly

perly, and edifyingly than any single pastor or minister can either extempore, or otherwise, how great abilities soever you may suppose him to be endowed with. And we know that by St *Paul's* directions, all gifts of what nature soever, which the Church enjoys, are to be exercised by us, so as may tend most to it's edification. Granting therefore, that all those places of scripture which mention the word gift, could be fairly understood of an ability to express our selves vocally in prayer, yet since this may be done better by forms composed at leisure, than on a sudden, I cannot see what authority they have from those places, for the practice of extempore prayer.

Q For he *neglects* not his *gift*, but on the contrary *stirs up* his *gift*, and *ministers* his *gift*, who employs it in that way that is most edifying: and therefore, since the gift of prayer, (if the word must be limited to that sense) is most edifyingly employ'd, when it is laid out in composing such devout and orderly forms, as are most fitting and becoming the publick worship of God: we have got that very argument on the side of forms, which hath been of all others, the most confidently urged against them.

But we cannot allow that those places of scripture are fairly interpreted, by being
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apply'd to support the cause of vocal extempore prayer.

St Paul writing to *Timothy*, charges him * in two several places, not to neglect the gift, but to stir up the gift which was given him by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. But what is all this to the purpose of extempore prayer? It was the gift not of prayer of any kind, but of episcopal power, which he was not to neglect but to stir up, *i. e.* to use and exert, as the occasions of the church required, as plainly appears by the two circumstances mention'd along with it, and setting forth the manner of his receiving it, *viz.* prophecy, and laying on of hands. For in the beginning of the gospel, the Holy Ghost itself pointed out the men that were to be bishops, by enabling the apostles to discern and declare their qualifications, and of what use they would be to the church, before they were ordained, and this is the reason why the gift, *i. e.* his Office was said to be given him by prophecy, and when that was actually conferr'd, we know the manner of that was, by laying on of Hands.

And therefore, if any one can infer from the word *gift*, as it stands in this place, the duty of the minister to pray extempore in the church, his reasoning, I must confess, is beyond my comprehension.

* 1 Tim. iv. 14. 2 Tim. i. 6.

Another text often brought for this purpose, is in the first epistle of St Peter, *ch. iv. ver. 10.*

As every Man hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Now, here the word gift *χαρισμα*, is of a dubious acceptance, some think it means only wealth, because the words immediately foregoing are, *use hospitality one towards another*: others think that it means the graces of the spirit, because the words immediately following are, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister let him do it as of the ability, which God giveth him, that God may be glorified in all things thro' Jesus Christ.*

But I think the word manifold, (*as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*) forbids us to limit the word gift, either to one or the other of these two senses, and plainly declares the meaning of the apostle to be this, that of what nature soever our endowments are, whether spiritual or temporal, we are to look upon them as given us for the use and benefit of one another; so that the cause of extempore prayer is just in the same state it was, for any thing that can be inferr'd from this text. Whatever abilities we have to pray, we are to use them

them, so as may be most edifying to the Church, which in our present circumstances we judge to be by stated forms rather than any other way, and I hope we have given good reason for it.

A third text of the same kind, and cited often for the same purpose as the other, you have in the 12th of the *Romans*, and 6th, 7th, and 8th verses, *Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith: or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation.*

Now upon this place it is observable, that among the several gifts here specify'd, there is no mention made of the gift of prayer at all; and tho' we should grant that it may be included in some of them, yet I do not see how any thing here said can be construed to the prejudice of praying to God by a stated form; for the direction here given how the Church is to use it's several gifts, is according to the proportion or analogy of faith, which certainly may be done by praying with care and premeditation, full as well as when we presume to do that office without them; nay, I think we are in much greater danger of transgressing this direction, and not obser-

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ving the proportion or analogy of faith in putting up sudden prayers, than such as are pre-compos'd with a careful regard had thereto.

But after we have said all we can for the justification of forms of prayer, some will be of opinion that to pray in other mens words, is to neglect the gift of prayer, if we are able to pray in our own; and so I own it were, if the gift of prayer consisted in the utterance of words. But, as we said before, here lies the foundation of all the mistake; the gift of prayer does not consist in words, but in affection; and therefore no man can be said to neglect the gift of prayer, that prepares his heart to pray devoutly, tho' he uses other mens words, nay tho' he should not, thro' weakness or other indisposition, use any words at all.

It is also to be observ'd here, that this objection is very indiscreetly urged, against praying by the help of other mens words in publick especially; for that must of necessity be done by all the congregation, excepting the minister only, even where he is allowed to pray after what manner he pleases.

By this time, I hope, you see to your satisfaction, upon what good grounds our Church goes in retaining the use of stated forms in her publick devotions, and with what
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what fallacious arguments and authorities the pretended duty of the minister, to pray extempore, or in words of his own chusing, is supported.

I come now to prove the third and last observation which I made from the text, *viz.* That when we pray, it is necessary we should use that very form which our Lord prescribed, in it's own words.

When ye pray, say Our Father, is St *Luke's* account, which is so plain a direction in the case, as could not possibly have afforded any handle for controversy, had not the account which St *Matthew* gives of this matter been translated so as may be wrested to that construction which they that are enemies to forms are willing to put upon him.

"Οὕτως προσέχετε are his words, and our translators have rendered them, *after this manner pray ye*, which has given occasion to some to say, that this prayer of our Lord's was intended only to be a pattern or directory to accommodate our prayers to, and not to be used by us as a prayer ready form'd and finished to our hands. Whereas the words do full as well bear to be translated, *pray thus*, in these words, or in this form. And therefore tho' they are translated, *after this manner pray ye*, yet

as even this rendering will, without any violence, admit of the same sense with the words of St *Luke*; which are not capable of being understood otherwise, than that we are to use this very form when we pray, so the plain and undoubted text must govern the doubtful one, and consequently our Saviour's meaning must be, that we pray not only in a manner agreeable to that form, but in that very form itself.

It is a dangerous thing for Christians surely to disobey their Lord upon any pretence, and especially in a case wherein his command is so plainly and positively given, as it is in this; and therefore we neither dare to omit the use of this form ourselves, nor be silent while we see others so hardy. Yet supposing we should be so unmindful of our duty as to give up this point to them that contest it with us, yet I don't see how it serves in the least, the purpose for which they chiefly do contest it; I mean, that they may thereby condemn the use of all set forms of prayer; for may not we accommodate our prayers to the matter and method of that directory which our Lord has given us, tho' we should grant it to be nothing more, when we pray by stated forms? Nay, may not we accommodate them better thus than otherwise? Since by infinitely varying our expressions, in which
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consists the nature of all prayers conceiv'd and spoken extempore, we may be in a good deal of danger to depart too far from the pattern that is set us.

But to return from this digression: if our blessed Lord had designed when he taught his disciples how to pray, not to give them a form of prayer to be used as such; but only to direct them for what things, and in what order to pray, what need had he to give them his directions in that manner in which he did give them? would not the suggesting of some heads of matter proper to be pray'd for without methodizing them into a formal prayer have done as well? nay, and have answer'd that purpose much better? since the delivering of his directions in so regular and absolute a form of prayer, would naturally lead them into the mistake of using it as such.

Nor does it appear as some would imagine and argue, that if it was intended to be used as a form of prayer at all, it was intended to be used as such only for a time, *i. e.* till after his ascension, when his followers were to be more fully instructed in the duty of prayer, by the coming of the Holy Ghost.

And yet if this were so, it would be necessary it should appear, and that plainly; because when there is such an express and positive command for a thing as
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there is for this, men are apt to look upon themselves as *perpetually* obliged to observe it, if there be not some time or period fixt when the use of it is to cease, which yet is not to be found concerning this in all the Scriptures.

It is true we don't find any instance of the apostles or other disciples of our Lord using this prayer after his ascent, but so neither do we before ; and it is far from being an argument that it was not to be used after that time that the Scriptures make no mention of it ; because, as we said before, where a thing is once expressly commanded without any limitation of time, there ought to be as express a command, or a reason equal to such a command, to take away the obligation.

Thus we continue the practice of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, because it was once commanded that we should do so, tho' there is no express record in all the Scriptures of any apostle or disciple of our Lord's baptizing in that form.

That they did baptize their converts however in that form, there is no doubt to be made, because our Lord had ordained it ; and so doubtless for the same reason when they pray'd to God, they used the form which their Lord had taught them, tho'
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the Scriptures have given us no instance of either.

It is enough, and as much as we can reasonably expect from Scripture, that it conveys to us our Lord's will in all cases that concern salvation; for it was not designed to be a perfect history of all that was said or done by them that followed him. Neither need we to be solicitous to know how punctually they observed his commands in all cases; but to take it for granted, that they did do so, when once we know what his commands are.

And yet when we come to read the accounts which are in other books of the worship of God amongst those Christians who liv'd nearest to the apostolical age, and therefore in all likelihood observed the customs of it, we find that the Lord's prayer was a constant part of their publick devotions: and consequently we cannot reasonably question, but that the apostles themselves used it, notwithstanding the Scriptures are so silent about it.

It appears indeed from the fourteenth of *St John's* Gospel, and so likewise from the sixteenth, that all prayers after Christ's ascent were to be offer'd up in his name, and yet there is no mention of his name in this prayer at all.

From hence again some would argue, that the use of it was confin'd to the time he was upon earth.

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But don't we pray in Christ's name when we pray in virtue of his mediation and intercession for us, depending upon his merits for the acceptance of our prayers, as much as if we made an express mention of it? And yet this is the case every time we put up the Lord's-Prayer; for since the doctrine of his mediatorial office has been made known and fully explain'd to us, we know we have no right to call God our Father, or to ask any thing from him but in and thro' Jesus Christ, who hath made us sons and heirs of God jointly with himself. And therefore tho' Christ did not think fit to insert his name in his own prayer, being at the time when he gave it not ascended, and seated at God's right-hand, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us: yet this does not prohibe the use of it, since his ascension; because praying in his name does not necessarily imply the mention of his name, but an inward and faithful dependance upon his merits and mediation, while we are performing that duty, and upon these terms alone we know we are allowed the privilege of putting up either this, or any other prayer to God.

Thus have I gone through the observations which I rais'd from the text, and shew'd you, *first*, That prayer is a christian duty. *Secondly*, That it is lawful at the least

least to use a set or precomposed form, in the performance of that duty. *Thirdly*, That it is necessary we should use that very form in it's own words, which our Saviour prescribed.

Give me leave now to express my concern, that this excellently well constituted church, to which we belong, should labour under the unhappiness of so great and obstinate a separation as it does, on the account of it's having set forms of prayer in it's publick worship.

If we consider the nature of the thing, how vastly more decent, as well as expedient, it is in all respects, that the majesty of the great **J E H O V A H**, should be approach'd, when we publickly worship him, with acts of devotion that have been carefully and deliberately prepared, than with any sudden and extempore professions of the same, there is no room to hesitate, to which we should give the preference; and if we consult the Scriptures, we find nothing there, you see, inconsistent with this determination; not one text that can with any propriety be interpreted in it's disfavour, but many reasons and arguments that may be drawn from thence for it's support: nay one form given and enjoined by our Saviour himself, which thing alone, without any other arguments, one would think, should have been sufficient to have

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silenc'd all objections to the use of forms, with those who profess to be his disciples.

Is it not a shame therefore, to see so many Christians serious in appearance at least, breaking the unity, and disturbing the peace of this reformed part of Christ's Church, on so unwarrantable a pretence? I don't find that our dissenting brethren withdraw from us on account of any doctrines we teach, different from those which they themselves believe; or because we are not provided with ministers that are fit and able to instruct them; neither of which points, I think, could with any truth be insisted on by them. For as to the first, that could not be alledged without declaring themselves to hold *some* doctrines at least not agreeable to Scripture, since we ourselves declare against all that have not their foundation there. And as to the second, surely we may be allowed, without any breach of truth or modesty, to say, that we are not inferior in that respect to any other communion they can possibly betake themselves to. And if they attempt not to justify their separation on either of these accounts, we cannot but think it very hard measure, that they should break with us for the manner of our devotions. For though we judge that we have many things to boast of, when compared with other national Churches, and as few things to be excepted against, as can
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be expected in a constitution where human wisdom is so much concern'd in the framing of it; yet we cannot but look upon our Liturgy, upon that very thing which so mightily offends our brethren, as a blessing by which we are as happily distinguished, as we are by any other whatsoever; and our reformed neighbours do plainly confess as much by the great regard they pay to it both here and abroad, wherever it has been translated into their own language.

It were to be wish'd therefore, that our brethren would but consider, how they must needs stand in the opinion of those who profess the same zeal for the Reformation with themselves. For this perhaps would have a good effect towards bringing them over to their duty. They hearken not, it may be, to the arguments offered by us, with that impartiality which they ought to do, because they think it is our interest to urge them.

But the judgment and practice of the foreign Reformed, is liable to no suspicion of this kind, and therefore if it would be any satisfaction to them, to have their conduct approved by them whom they themselves do most approve, they must no longer make our Liturgy an occasion of Schism.

I will not here take upon me to say, as much as I esteem our Liturgy, that there is nothing in it that can possibly be altered

for the better ; for this is more than ought to be said of any human composition, and the * compilers of it themselves have declared it alterable, upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, and as shall seem most meet and expedient to them that are in authority: but I will be bold to affirm, that there is nothing in it that can justify the separation that has been made on that account ; and that if we are to wait for another, till one can be drawn up that shall be more generally approved than this is, 'tis probable we may never live to see it.

I have all along look'd upon this controversy with great concern, as it hath given occasion to our common enemies, the Papists, to insult and reproach the Reformation ; and been the main engine by which they have endeavour'd to destroy that, in order to set up Popery again upon it's ruins. But at this time I look upon it with greater concern still, there being now another kind of enemy in our quarters, that takes advantage of our divisions, and turns them to a worse use, if possible, than that of Popery itself ; I mean that great apostacy from the whole Christian faith and doctrine, which hath of late so shamefully appeared amongst us.

* *Preface to the Common-Prayer.*

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The abettors of this would have us think, that the animosities that are among Christians, arising from their differences about their religion, a sufficient reason why we should lay that quite aside, and follow the law of nature only ; a law which they pretend 'tis impossible for men ever to wrangle and dispute about, as they have done about Christianity. I make no question but they would be found to be as wrong as they are confident in this conclusion, for men will as certainly differ concerning the dictates of the natural law, if that should ever be set up for the sole rule of our actions, as now they do concerning the doctrines of the gospel. But be that as it will, yet since this use is made of our divisions, it is well worth our while, I think, to look into the grounds of them, and to sacrifice our disputes, where we can, to the peace of the Church, that we may unite the better in the defence of our common Christianity. For what a madness is it, for persons who have the cause of the gospel truly at heart, as I hope our Dissenting Brethren have, to be teizing themselves and their fellow-christians, with those little differences, as I may comparatively call them, that are between them and us, while the faith which we profess in common, is in manifest danger of being destroy'd for want of a better agreement among our selves. This
alone

alone methinks should be a cogent argument with them, at this time, to dispose them to obedience, and heartily to join with us in this prayer, * *That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the flight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love. Into which happy state may God thro' his infinite wisdom and mercy conduct the divided members of this National Church, for his sake who loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.*

* Eph. iv. 14, 15, 16, &c.

F I N I S.